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Levels of Explanation and the Individuation of Events: a difficulty for the token identity theory

Bill Brewer

1. Introduction

We make how a person acts intelligible by revealing it as rational in the light of what she perceives, thinks, wants and so on. For example, we might explain that she reached out and picked up a glass because she was thirsty and saw that it contained water. In doing this, we are giving a causal explanation of her behaviour in terms of her antecedent beliefs, desires and other attitudes. Her wanting a drink and realizing that the glass contained one caused her reaching out and grasping for it. This tells us how the action came about and makes sense of why it happened. At least, something broadly along these lines strikes me as a fairly crude and partial regimentation of our pretheoretic understanding of everyday action explanation.¹

Now much of the behaviour we explain this way clearly involves the physical movement of parts of the agent's body. So the question naturally arises how anything like her seeing the glass or feeling thirsty can possibly 'make contact' with, or influence this movement. Although it may be a minor overstatement to call it the orthodoxy, some form of token identity theory is an extremely popular answer here. The basic idea is that a complete and exhaustive physical explanation of the movement provides all the relevant causal

¹Henceforth, where possible, I shall simply refer to this as 'psychological explanation'.

explanatory elements, but that the events cited in psychological explanations are still rightly held to affect action simply because they are each identical to something mentioned at the physical level. We solve the problem of how psychological explanations 'make contact' with the physical body by identifying the events they cite with physical events in the brain which bring about bodily movements.² There is no incoherence in the idea of a psychological explanation of physical action, because the psychological and physical levels of explanation are integrated by the token identity theory: they both cite items from a single underlying web of causes and effects in explaining behaviour. Perhaps physics just does this in a more complete and detailed way, with psychological explanations stressing the significant high points in slightly different terms.

Its near orthodoxy notwithstanding, there are opponents of the token identity theory. Many are really after a larger target: the commonsense conception of psychological explanation as a species of causal explanation offered above. The argument assumes that something like the token identity theory is the only option for a causal construal of psychological explanation, and then goes on to claim that this fails to capture an essential characteristic of that mode of explanation. I shall argue here that the real difficulty with the token identity theory is in fact its failure to take sufficiently seriously a feature of our pretheoretic picture of psychological explanation precisely as a species of causal explanation, rather than anything that ultimately undermines this view. This should bring out what is wrong with the conditional assumption that if psychological explanation is causal, then some

²Jennifer Hornsby (1980, ch. 1) stresses the need to distinguish the transitive and intransitive senses of 'bodily movement'. With the obvious subscripts, the idea is that a person's moving_T her arm is an action which causes her arm to move_I. In this context, the token identity theorist's point would then be that actions which are bodily movements_T are identical to brain events which cause corresponding bodily movements_I; the actions themselves are causally explained by beliefs, desires, intentions and so on, each identical to some prior brain event.

form of token identity theory must be true.

In section 2 I outline my argument against the token identity theory. Sections 3 to 5 develop its premises and establish its conclusion. In section 6 I distinguish the considerations motivating my argument from a version of instrumentalism about psychological explanation which I argue is incoherent.

2. The argument in outline

The crucial component of our commonsense understanding of psychological explanation for my argument is the idea that this is a *particular kind* of causal explanation. Davidson (1980b and 1980c) famously insists on the constitutive role of rationality in psychological explanation and interpretation.³ This is the thought I want to develop. A fundamental difference between psychological and physical explanation is that the former is *normative*, making things intelligible as being (approximately) how they rationally ought to be, rather than simply as an instance of the way things generally tend to happen. We psychologically explain a person's action by citing what it is about him that makes it the rational outcome. I shall argue that we have a genuine explanation only if the explanans causes the explanandum *in virtue of rationalizing it*. Physical explanation, on the other hand, simply appeals to features of the situation which tend to give rise to movements of the kind involved: any question of rationality is quite out of place. This crucial appeal to causally relevant reason-giving links between the mental properties involved in psychological explanation stems from the fact that such properties are features of a person's point of view on the world around him

³The point is provocatively developed by John McDowell (1985).

- how it is presented to him in perception and thought and how he would prefer it to be. Of course he has such a point of view partly in virtue of what is going on inside him; but also, and very importantly, in virtue of what this does for him as the world impinges on him and him on it. The way physical explanation identifies explanatory units, or events in the brain and nervous system, has no need of any of this embedding, which is why questions of rationality just do not arise. But then why should we expect both explanatory schemes to pick out the very same underlying causal explanatory web of events?

The envisaged answer to this rhetorical question, that we should reject any general identification of psychological and physical event tokens, is confirmed by an application to the events involved in psychological and physical explanations of a conceptualist realism along the lines Wiggins (1980) urges concerning substances.⁴ The situation with events figuring in the two types of causal explanation is, I think, quite similar to that he argues obtains between material objects of different kinds. Consider, for example, a statue and the lump of bronze out of which it is constituted. Although the bronze, in a sense, makes up the statue, it is not, according to Wiggins, identical with it, because the statue might cease to exist, whilst the bronze persists: perhaps refashioned into a support for a bridge. Their persistence conditions embody quite different commitments, stemming from the nature of the sortal concepts only under which they are each identified and singled out determinately. Similarly here, it seems to me that the identification of psychological and physical events as unified individual occurrences, worthy of attention and relevant to understanding what is happening, is driven in part by the nature of the explanatory project in which they pull their

⁴A suggestion of how this view might be extended as an account of event identity, very much along the lines developed here, is given by Jennifer Hornsby (1985).

weight.⁵ In both types of explanation, we pick up on the goings on in the world which do the things we are interested in. The nature of our explanatory needs and interests bring to light the relevant events as coherent units, which might otherwise, in the context of quite different quests for understanding, go unnoticed, or appear as gerrymandered or coincidental concatenations. Given the radically different natures of physical and psychological explanation, then, we should resist any temptation to suppose that these events coincide, that each mode of explanation draws on one and the same underlying stock of causally related token event elements.

There is absolutely no need for anything like Descartes' (1986, II and VI) soul substance here, in which psychological events occur, just as Wiggins has no need for immaterial statue stuff. Mental events depend upon all sorts of physical goings on, as these are happening in a person embedded in a world, just as the statue is constituted by the lump of bronze, as this is fashioned and regarded in a certain human context.⁶ In neither case though, according to the relevant form of conceptual realism, do we have identities between the things in question.

Clearly the two considerations I am advancing here are related. For it is the

⁵In fact I am very sceptical about Wiggins' account of the identity of material objects. Nevertheless, its analogue seems precisely to capture an essential feature of the interdependence between event individuation and explanation. Indeed I believe that this marks a very important difference between substances on the one hand and events, properties, states and processes on the other, in respect of their mind-dependence, in a very special and restricted sense of that term. But this is to take on far too much metaphysics than we really need here. For an excellent recent discussion of these topics, see Michael Ayers 1991, vol. 2, esp. parts I and III.

⁶Of course a great deal of work needs to be done in spelling out the nature of the dependency relation I urge obtains between the events figuring in psychological and physical explanations. The point I am arguing here is only that this cannot correctly be construed as one of identity.

fundamental difference in psychological and physical explanatory requirements highlighted by the first, that is my endorsement of the Davidsonian insistence on the normativity of psychological explanation, which constitutes the principled ground for the relative autonomy in event individuation insisted upon by the second, that is my application of Wiggins' conceptualist realism to the category of events. The crucial argumentative weight, then, rests on the appeal to a constitutive role for the norm of rationality in the very identity of the psychological realm. This is the idea to which I shall now turn.

3. The normativity of psychological explanation

We can introduce the essential role of the norm of rationality in psychological explanation by a couple of examples. Firstly, consider Davidson's climber (1980a, p. 79). She is desperate to rid herself of the weight and danger of holding her partner on a rope. This desire, together with the sudden realization that simply letting go would satisfy it, so unnerve her that she lets him fall. Second, take the following example of Kathleen Lennon's (1990, p. 38). A hypnotist brings it about that regardless of the content of Jane's next belief, it will produce a further belief that there are six apples on the table. He then induces in her a belief that there are two groups of three apples each on the table, with the result that she does indeed come to believe that there are six apples on the table.

In both cases, the cause of what the agent does is a reason for her doing it. But in neither case does appeal to this constitute a satisfactory psychological explanation of her behaviour. The putative reason does not cause the action in the right way, the reason-giving relation itself is causally irrelevant. What is missing in both of these examples is a crucial connection between the rationalizing and causal roles of her reason. A further necessary

condition on genuine psychological explanation, then, is that the explanans should cause the explanandum *in virtue of rationalizing it*, not merely as well as rationalizing it.⁷

Intentional states of psychological subjects stand in various reason-giving relations. My believing that it is wednesday, and that wednesday is the deadline for completing my paper, gives me a reason for believing that I have very little time left to get it finished. Similarly, your wanting to voice disagreement with me, and believing that the paper is open for discussion, give you a reason for raising your objection. In general, there are truths concerning psychological properties *F* and *G*, of the following form. Other things being equal, being *F* provides a reason for being *G*.⁸ The nature and origin of such truths is of great interest and importance, and is discussed in section 4 below. For the moment though, my point is simply to insist that it is a necessary condition on a person's being *F*'s psychologically explaining her being *G*, that her being *F* causes her being *G* in virtue of such a truth, to the effect that her being *F* gives her a reason for being *G*. This is what I mean by the claim that it is essential to genuine psychological explanation that the explanans should cause the explanandum *in virtue of rationalizing it*. I call this the causation-in-virtue-of-rationalization condition on psychological explanation.

The key to seeing the potential of this feature of psychological explanation to undermine the assumption of a single causal web of events underlying both psychological

⁷This is an extremely rough and ready theoretical place-holder for a far more extensive and detailed account than I can give here, perhaps broadly along the lines of that offered in terms of the notion of 'differential explanation' by Christopher Peacocke (1979, ch. II, sect. 2). The point is simply to illustrate the constitutive role played by the norm of rationality in characterizing psychological explanation. My way of introducing the point and putting it in terms of causation-in-virtue-of-rationalization was suggested by Louise Antony (1989, pp. 167-8). She in turn acknowledges Joe Levine in this respect.

⁸Notice that it will very often be the case that being *F* is a conjunctive property.

and physical explanations, which lies behind the token identity theory, is to reflect further on its source and rationale. For the intrinsic normativity of psychological explanation is grounded in a form of subjectivity of the mental quite alien to physical ways of making sense of the world. So this explanatory contrast between psychological rationalization and (mere) physical causation, is very far from incidental. It is the basis for a significant autonomy, and difference in principle, in the ways these contrasting modes of understanding identify and bring to light the goings on they attempt to make intelligible to us.

4. The source and centrality of psychological normativity

Ascribing beliefs and desires, and the other principal properties involved in psychological explanation, is ascribing to a subject certain attitudes towards particular representational contents: that of judging the world to be as represented and that of assigning some preference or value, in a very wide sense (desirability) to its being so. Therefore sincerely holding such attitudes is aiming at truth, thus knowledge, and at satisfaction, thus, to the extent to which such desires figure in determining action, success, respectively. It is essential to the very nature of these mental states that to be in them is to be governed by the general considerations required to preserve such connections. The normative rationality relations central to psychological explanation are a consequence of this fact. For to the extent that one is genuinely aiming to capture the way the world is in judgement, in coming to one's beliefs that p, q, r, \dots for example, one has a certain commitment to having one's further judgement guided by deductive and inductive reasoning. One ought ideally also to believe whatever deductively or inductively follows from p, q, r, \dots and not to believe anything logically or physically inconsistent with them, or at least to revise any such beliefs which are deductively or inductively undermined by new evidence. In other words, one is committed to having the

course and development of one's beliefs shaped and controlled by principles of deductive and inductive rationality, because such principles are precisely those which preserve and extend truth, hence knowledge, which is the very point and purpose of belief.

Similarly, to the extent to which one is genuinely assigning preference or value to various ways the world might be in forming pro attitudes, in coming to desire that p, q, r, \dots for example, one has a certain commitment to having one's overall pattern of such attitudes shaped by considerations of what else is required for their satisfaction. In the absence of obvious conflict, one ought ideally also to attach derived desirability to whatever is necessary for bringing it about that p, q, r, \dots . All other things being equal, and within practical limitations, one ought to intend to achieve what one desires most, and not to intend anything incompatible with this. Again in the absence of conflict, one ought at the appropriate time to try to do whatever is required to achieve this, and not to do anything that might hinder it. In other words, one is committed to having the course and development of one's desires, intentions and actions shaped and controlled by principles of practical rationality, because such principles are precisely those which best promote success, hence satisfaction, which is the very point and purpose of desire.⁹

To fail in these requirements, then, is to undermine the *whole point* of the intentional states involved. Believing, desiring, and so on, are properties of persons, part of the very nature of which it is to make substantial rationality requirements on them. This is the source

⁹This account is very crude, and misses all the well-known complexities which have traditionally exercised philosophers interested in practical reasoning. But such a broad sweep is all that is required for my current purposes, which are to bring out the source of the rationality requirements essential to the explanatory power of folk psychological appeals to a person's propositional attitudes in understanding his behaviour.

of the condition on genuine psychological explanation, that the explanans should cause the explanandum *in virtue of rationalizing it*, not merely as well as rationalizing it. For only then is the psychological explanans really contributing to the causal explanation in a way which makes pointing to its being an intentional state of the kind it is relevant to our understanding of why the person did what he did. Facts of the form that, other things being equal, being *F* provides a reason for being *G*, on which this peculiarity of psychological explanation rests, are themselves grounded in the nature of what it is to be a subject of propositional attitudes. They derive from the fact that to be such a subject is to have a point of view on the world, to be guided in thought and action by the evolving goals of truthfully representing how things are and satisfying one's preferences about how things should be. In other words, the rationale for the normative force of the rational ideal in psychological explanation is the fact that the propositional attitudes in terms of which it is given are features of a unified, temporally extended, perspective on the world, of a person in the world with the interwoven aims over time of expanding knowledge in judgement and achieving success in action.

This form of psychological subjectivity is quite alien to the concerns of physical explanation, where any association with the notion of a person's continuously developing point of view on the world is beside the point. What are explanatorily relevant are regularities amongst what are regarded simply as features of the world. The notion of these as features of a person's rationally evolving perspective on the world plays absolutely no part in the intelligibility sought or offered at all, never mind the indispensable central part it plays in constituting appeals to agents' propositional attitudes genuinely psychologically explanatory of their behaviour.

So the causation-in-virtue-of-rationalization condition is no incidental extra to the

project of psychologically explaining what a person does. Its absence as a requirement on satisfactory physical explanation is equally integral to the nature of that way of understanding what is going on in the world. This explanatory contrast, then, between the normativity of the psychological and the non-normativity of the physical, reaches right to the heart of the mode of making sense of things constitutive of each kind of explanation.

5. Conceptualist realism and the individuation of events

In this section I want to develop a parallel for the category of events to David Wiggins' (1980, ch. 5) conceptualist realism about substances.¹⁰ I am not so much interested in such a theory in its complete generality, but rather in the selective use of its resources, along with my discussion of normativity above, to refute the widespread assumption that any causal explanatory force of commonsense psychological rationalization rests on its reference to a subset of the events and causal relations constituting an underlying web of basic elements which is the domain of physical explanation. This is the general idea of a single causal web of token events which contains all the materials for both psychological and physical explanations. In particular, it sustains the thesis that every psychological event token is identical to some physical event token.

The thought behind my rejection of this whole conception of things might loosely be put as follows. Which events one finds in the world depends essentially upon how one is looking. There is not a single stock of neutral events, and causal relations between them, members of which are variously picked out, with variable explanatory illumination, by

¹⁰This extension to events was originally suggested by Jennifer Hornsby (1985).

different kinds of descriptions. It is rather that the very identification and singling out of particular events as unitary items worthy of attention, is dependent on and controlled by the role of their types in the lawlike generalizations of some causal explanatory theory, which makes it intelligible to us why things of one kind follow those of another. Fundamentally different explanatory concerns bring to light quite different regularities between quite different kinds of events, whose coherence and integrity as intelligibly related *individuals* is apparent only from the point of view of that particular way of understanding what is going on in the world, by their being *intelligibly* related. Autonomous levels of explanation bring into focus their own explanatory units.

Notice very importantly here that event existence, identity and unity are *made apparent* by involvement in a given explanatory purpose, not constituted by it. This is to stress the *realist* component of conceptualist realism. Wiggins' own analogy with fishing helps to make the point vivid (1980, p. 141). The kind of bait or size of net one uses determines which fish one will catch, but not which fish there are. Similarly, explanatory concerns and the kind of intelligibility sought determine which events come to light, but these are nonetheless real independent goings on in the world.¹¹

Why ought we to believe any such account of event individuation? To begin with, unlike its original application to the category of substances in my view, it seems simply articulative of plain common sense. It is far more plausible in this case to insist that questions of identity require something analogous to sortal completion for their determinacy. The question whether what is happening here now is the very same thing as what was happening

¹¹This is highly relevant to distinguishing my account from any form of instrumentalism. See section 6 below.

here five minutes ago needs some answer to the question "same what?" if it is to be fully formed. Furthermore, it is again more immediately plausible with respect to events than with respect to substances to give as the rationale for this our need to make it specific which of the things going on here now and five minutes ago are in question. Determinacy in singling out the events about which to ask of their identity involves some notion of the kind of occurrence one is concerned with.

Then it seems that the answer here, the required articulation of the kind of occurrence in question, is given precisely by some indication of the general nature of the explanatory concerns into which one's question fits. For example, one might specify an interest in the efficiency and operation of an artificial limb, the moral appraisal of a person's behaviour, the fitness of an athlete for a big race, the physiological achievement of the immune system or a gymnast's perfectly held handstand, the point of a person's inactivity, or the hidden agenda behind the way the meeting is going. These various kinds of concern help identify different subject matters, and thus contribute to the determinate singling out of particular events about which identity questions are only then fully formed.

It might be objected that all this is simply a manifestation of the implicit intensionality of the original question. What is really being asked is whether what is going on here now still falls under an implicit, or so far unspecified, description under which it fell five minutes ago, or simply whether there is anything going on here now which falls under a particular description under which something going on here five minutes ago fell. In both cases this would provide an alternative explanation of the need for more to be said to make sense of the relevant pseudo-identity questions. Instead of a deep metaphysical need fully to determine which particular individuals are in question, all the objector sees is a superficial

semantic need simply to clarify which particular question is being asked about easily identified individuals: not which events, but which similarities between them, are of interest.

Now I do not think that this is generally the right account of the matter, or the right thing to say about the indeterminacy of incomplete identities concerning events. On the other hand, one must obviously make room for the uncontroversial occurrence that many different descriptions determinately pick out the very same event. The balance between the conceptualist and realist components of the most promising conceptualist realism about event individuation is extremely delicate. My concern, though, is with a particular application of this idea, to the relation between the events figuring in psychological and physical explanations, rather than its general form and universal truth, and the current line of objection is extremely difficult to maintain in this connection.

Suppose it were the correct strategy. Then the underlying metaphysical picture must be of a given, neutral web of events and causal relations between them - all there really is out there - onto which the two explanatory schemes selectively fit, through their characteristic event identifications' singling out particular nodes of the neutral web, and with their causal explanatory force deriving from the given relations between these node elements. More particularly, the token identity theory can be seen as an elaboration of this underlying picture in two stages. First, a conviction that the physical sciences will ultimately bring this entire evolving complex under systematic explanatory laws, each constituent event falling under some physical description. Second, a thesis that these very same event tokens provide all the causally related elements figuring in psychological explanations, in which they simply fall under different descriptions bringing out the patterns of similarity and difference between them relevant to that particular mode of explanation.

But a set of psychological identifications cannot satisfactorily be made of events at the nodes of such a framework without some attention to the nature of the causal relations between them. In particular, notorious cases of deviance must be ruled out. This requires some consideration of the explanatory relations holding between causally related events though, which, as we saw in section 3 above, depends essentially on some appeal to the nature of the causal process relating them. Yet this, in turn, is precisely what is denied in principle by the stripped down universal skeleton of causally related events which is supposed to provide the ingredients for both psychological and physical explanations. For its causal relations and systematic evolution are meant to be covered completely by the laws governing physical explanation, in which the notion of causation-in-virtue-of-rationalization has absolutely no role.

In other words, the first and second stages of the token identity theorist's elaboration of the underlying metaphysical picture above are incompatible. No single underlying web of given events and causal relations can accept the imposition of event identifications respecting the explanatory concerns of the two levels of explanation. Certainly in this case, then, the determinate singling out of particular events by psychological and physical descriptions is dependent upon and responsive to the nature of the explanations in which such descriptions figure, in such a way that the intrinsic dissimilarity between psychological and physical explanations in respect of their concern with the norm of rationality bars the joint satisfaction of such descriptions by the nodes of one neutral web of causally related events.

Causation-in-virtue-of-rationalization is a *sui generis* notion, delivered by the concerns of psychological intelligibility, interest in which brings to light an autonomous

causal web of psychological events. Just as the relation has a life of its own in the context of the search for psychological understanding, so do the events which are its relata. In this very important sense, conceptualist realism is true about the individuation of psychological and physical events, and the token identity theory is false.

It is worth making absolutely clear here that this line of argument against the token identity theory is in no way compromised by any suggested possibility of a mereological construction of larger from smaller events.¹² The idea would be that psychological events are identical to composite events built up exclusively out of smaller physical events. But, as we have just seen, the considerations unifying psychological events will not be principles of organization justified, or even available, from within the explanatory concerns of physical theory. So if the suggestion is to have any chance at all of succeeding, the mereological composition relation must be driven by considerations from outside the domain of physical explanation, which is precisely to deny that the resulting composites would in fact be physical events at all. Although an agent's intentionally raising her arm, for example, depends in some way upon the physical events involving her motor cortex, CNS, arm muscles, or whatever, it will be no mere fusion of these, because the principles of organization and unification bearing on the identity of the active psychological event will have their rationale only at the psychological level, and appear quite coincidental or arbitrary from any other explanatory perspective. So from the point of view of physical understanding, any such set of microscopic goings on will appear like a shapeless random collection, hardly worthy of attention and certainly not contributing to our making sense of what is happening. Psychological events do not stand out as physical explanatory units, because the concerns

¹²For an excellent discussion of the difficulties with any such proposal, see Hornsby 1985.

controlling the determinate identification of such individuals are quite different in the two cases. Furthermore, it is by no means obvious that one could even justify the assumption that every psychological event partitions the set of physical events going on for some of the same time into those which determinately are its components and those which determinately are not.

My stress here on normativity conditions on the integrity of psychological explanation, in order to resist any *prima facie* plausibility the token identity theory might have, has a certain affinity with interpretationist and instrumentalist views in the philosophy of mind. Indeed I do think that the conceptualism in my conceptualist realism is the right way to bring out what is correct and important in such views. But there seem to be deep problems with their stronger, constitutive, variants, on which this conceptualism is unqualified by what I take to be the realist element of my position. To finish with, I want briefly to bring out these difficulties and so to make clearer the differences between my own position and what I shall call *constitutive* interpretationism and instrumentalism. This will, I hope, add something more to the crucial discussion of how, in my view, conceptualism and realism might coexist in the correct account of the individuation of psychological and physical events in explanation. Put another way, as rather more of a challenge, unless the considerations on the basis of which I argue against the token identity theory can be distinguished from a form of instrumentalism which effectively denies the reality of psychological phenomena, I will have failed to resist the claim that only the token identity theory can give a genuinely realist construal of the pretheoretic understanding of our everyday action explanation with which I began.

6. Errors in instrumentalism

The point of contact between my own views and broadly interpretationist or instrumentalist ways of thinking about the mind, is the idea that the appropriateness of psychological explanation and the status of a person as a psychological subject go hand in hand. On my own account though, this is because the explanations are peculiarly suited to the real objective occurrences they bring to light and make intelligible. Although things are epistemologically the reverse, the order of metaphysical priority is from the occurrence of psychological events to the application of psychological explanations. There may be no way of characterizing which goes on these are, or of getting to know of their existence, other than by some reference to the understanding advanced by psychological explanations in which they figure. Nevertheless, their occurrence is perfectly independent and indeed explanatory of this intelligibility. The order of philosophical explanation is from the nature of the events to the value of the mode of explanation.

According to the constitutive interpretationist or instrumentalist, on the other hand, it is rather that the explanatory fruitfulness and predictive success of psychological rationalization themselves constitute the reality, occurrence or existence of the events in question.¹³ That psychological explanation is useful in connection with the behaviour of a given material organism just is what it is for the object of that explanation to be a psychologically endowed person, what it is for the psychological ascriptions made in giving the explanation to be *true*.

¹³The obvious proponent of such a view is Dennett (1969 and 1989). Slightly more controversial, but still, I think, at least in some work, a proponent of the strong constitutive thesis, is Davidson (1984, essays 9-11; and 1986).

As we have seen though, it is the idea of a subject of intentional states as having a point of view on the world, aiming at truth and satisfaction, which makes *sense* of the central role of the rational ideal in psychological explanations of his thought and action. So it is only a conception of the propositional attitudes cited in these explanations as features of such a perspective which sustains the explanatory value of folk psychological rationalization. The nature and worth of psychological explanation is *dependent* upon the inherent nature of the person to whom it is applied. He should have a unified point of view on the world, with the aims of faithfully representing the way it is in judgement and bringing it into line with his overall pattern of desires in action.

This point gives teeth to the familiar intuition that these constitutive positions somehow have the direction of *philosophical* explanation the wrong way round. Surely it is *because* a person actually believes that *p* or desires that *q*, that in completely accounting for the intentionality of his behaviour, including his linguistic behaviour, the ideal radical interpreter should ascribe these attitudes to him. It is *because* these states capture the ways he judges and prefers the world to be, that an overall interpretation including such ascriptions will fit and make sense of the facts about his actions and utterances. Similarly, it is precisely *because* he believes that *p* or desires that *q*, that predictions about the patterns in his behaviour made on the basis of what he rationally ought to do given these attitudes will be successful, and that explanations of what he does citing these intentional states add to our understanding of his behaviour.

Constitutive interpretationism and instrumentalism fail to give full weight to these truisms by placing the onus of illumination onto their converses. So for Davidson, on this reading of him, it is right to ascribe such beliefs and desires to a subject *because*

interpretations made on the basis of their ascription make sense of what he does and says, where this is not meant merely as a recommendation about what counts as *evidence* for various third person mental ascriptions, but as a *constitutive* account of what it is to possess the propositional attitudes concerned. In the same vein, Dennett maintains that it is *true* to say that a person believes that *p* or desires that *q* to just the extent to which behavioural predications made on the basis of what rationally ought to follow from his being in such states are accurate. Their insistence that the intelligibility and success of psychological explanations and predictions citing a person's possession of particular propositional attitudes is *constitutive* of his very possession of those attitudes, is far worse than any mere difference of emphasis. It undermines the coherence of the whole approach.

To see this, recall my discussion in section 4 above, of the source of, and rationale for, the normativity of psychological explanation. We saw in section 3 that it is a necessary condition on genuine psychological explanation that the explanans should cause the explanandum in virtue of rationalizing it. The argument of the following section was then that this requirement is grounded in the nature of the properties cited in such explanations as features of a person's unified, temporally extended, perspective on the world around him, with the interwoven aims over time of expanding knowledge in judgement and achieving success in action.

In other words, in psychologically explaining what a person is doing, one is citing as explanans a real feature of the subject's integrated point of view on the world, which causes his behaviour in virtue of rationalizing it. In giving such an explanation, one is pointing to a causally relevant aspect of a person's perspective on things, in such a way that its bringing about the explanandum is made intelligible, thus conferring on it the status of explanans, in

virtue of its providing a *reason* why the explanandum ought ideally to occur. Its actually providing such a reason is in turn made intelligible, which completes the explanation, by the very *point* of the kind of attitude it is characterized as being to the particular proposition concerned.

Now notice that the last clause here is indispensable. For citing a cause which happens to be a reason, even if it is a cause in virtue of being a reason, is still explanatorily hopeless if its *being* such a reason is itself quite mysterious. But it is difficult to see how this can be anything but mysterious on the constitutive approach shared by Davidson and Dennett.

In their view, and using the notion of being interpretable very widely, to cover both accounts, to have such propositional attitudes as figure in psychological explanations is to be interpretable as having them. To be so interpretable, is to be made sense of in a certain way, precisely by the use of psychological explanation. If this way of being made sense of is to succeed in making sense, in being genuinely explanatory, then a certain conception of its explanans must be available, one which makes its status as a reason clear. At this point though, the only conception of the explanans which is available will not do. For this is given simply by another appeal to the intelligibility to be gained from the very same psychological explanation: to have the propositional attitude cited as explanans is to be interpretable as having it. But now we are well and truly on a viciously circular path.

We can break out of this circularity only with the added resources of my conceptualist *realist* alternative to the unqualified conceptualism of the constitutive approach. The way to remove the mystery is to avail oneself of an understanding of psychological explanantia

which is not crudely constituted by their explanatory value. All we need here, as we have already seen, is the intuitive, perfectly non-reductive, conception of propositional attitudes as real features of a person's point of view on the world around him, which immediately, and quite intelligibly, generates the crucial reason-giving relations upon which the explanatory force of psychological explanation depends. We can have this intuitive conception because we have the idea of these as genuinely independent properties of their subject, not constituted by, but explaining, the understanding to be gained from the psychological explanations in which they appear.

So far as I can see, there is absolutely no inconsistency between this idea and my thesis of conceptual realism about the individuation of psychological and physical events. To insist we keep it is precisely to distance the position from the more extreme constitutive interpretationism or instrumentalism of Davidson and Dennett, by stressing the realism which counterbalances their unqualified conceptualism. It is a good thing that there is no inconsistency, because their constitutive approach is incoherent.¹⁴

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